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American Dietetic Association

February 4, 2009

Mr. Roy Brown and Kim Gillan (Co Sponsors)

Members of Business and Labor Committee

Montana State Legislature

Helena, MT 59624

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the SB 234 "An Act requiring insurance coverage for autism spectrum disorders." On behalf of the Registered Dietitians' (RD) from the great state of Montana we are asking for you to support including the Registered Dietitian (RD) as the nutrition expert to provide nutrition services, therapies and education for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The reasons are outlined below.

Children with Autism are at increased risk for malnutrition due to the following main reasons:

1. Feeding Problems
2. Medications/Drug Nutrient Interactions
3. Specific Nutrient Deficiencies
4. Gastrointestinal disorders

1. Feeding Problems: Children with ASD are most often classified as problem feeders. Children often have a highly restricted range of food (<20 foods). They often "burnout" on foods they've previously eaten, but frequently do not gain new foods to replace those lost. Children with ASD also habitually react negatively when presented with unfamiliar foods. They often refuse entire categories of food based on texture, odor, or appearance. To add new foods often takes upwards of 25 different exposures before they are accepted.

Children with ASD are Problem Feeders

- Limited number of accepted foods
- Refuse certain textures, odors, and appearances
- Unusual mealtime habits

How the RD can help

- An RD is uniquely qualified to assist parents, caregivers and healthcare providers to understand the multitude of physical, psychological, nutritional, sensory and behavioral factors contributing to feeding problems.
- An RD can assist in the identification of specific strategies to address the nutritional gaps often found in the child's food environment.
- With RD expertise treatment of feeding disorders results in significantly improved energy consumption and nutritional status. (Schwarz SM et al, 2001).

2. Medications used in controlling autism related behaviors often increase nutrition related problems and complications.

Drug Nutrient Interactions can further disrupt normal growth and development due to various side effects and secondary conditions from medications used to treat psychological and behavioral related problems found in children with ASD.

Stimulants

- Decrease appetite and weight
- Abdominal pain
- Gastrointestinal pain and distress

Anti-psychotic

- Increase/Decrease weight
- Reflux
- Constipation

Anti-Depressants

- Decrease appetite and weight
- Nausea, Vomiting
- Gastrointestinal pain and distress

How RD Access can help

- RD can identify drug nutrient interactions and target specific nutrients affected.
- Work with parents and caregivers on strategies to help ameliorate appetite disturbances.
- Assist the medical team to identify medications that do not exacerbate poor nutrition.

3. Nutrient Deficiencies and Gastrointestinal Disorders (GI)

Nutrient deficiencies and GI problems are common in children with ASD.

Nutrient Deficiencies

- Restricted/Poor diets can increase risk for malnutrition
- Essential Fatty Acids deficiencies
- Iron deficiency Anemia

How RD Access can help

- RD can provide basic and advanced level nutrition interventions targeted to treat nutrient deficiencies.
- RD can assist parents and caregivers on strategies to improve intake given the complex factors involved in poor intake.
- RD can provide nutritional expertise in supervising parents and caregivers with the use of diet therapies/elimination diets often used to treat GI disturbances and food allergies.

4. Gastrointestinal Disorders

Many children with ASD suffer from undiagnosed GI disorders unable to verbally express the pain they feel.

Common Symptoms

- Abdominal Pain
- Abdominal distention
- Gaseousness
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

How RD Access can help

- RD is uniquely qualified to identify GI disorders based on physical and behavioral symptoms often associated with mealtimes.
- RD can assist the medical team in identifying and treating GI disorders.
- RD can provide nutritional expertise in supervising parents and caregivers with the use of diet therapies/elimination diets often used to treat GI disturbances and problems.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Please feel free to contact me or us for further clarification.

Sincerely,



Susan Jordan

President-Elect Montana Dietetic Association